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Abstract

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The Buffy panel, which I had been psyched about, made me-a fan who owns five seasons of the awesome series on DVD-feel like a complete idiot. Nicholas Brendon (Xander) was scheduled to be there and that would have been cool. He failed to show up and I'm not sure if he ever arrived for his autograph signings (for which fans were charged \$35); one guy I spoke to said he'd looked for Brendon and hadn't found him anywhere. The only other panelists I cared remotely about were Juliet Landau, who played Spike's paramour, Drusilla, and Bianca Lawson, who played the ill-fated second slayer Kendra (in all of three episodes). I'm not sure if Lawson even said a single thing throughout the panel discussion and Q&A. My favorite moment was when Landau said a few lines in her character's accent, which was fun to see in person. Fans of the Buffy spin-off, *Angel*, were also really excited by Jonathan Woodward (who appeared in only one episode of *Buffy*, as well as one unaired episode of *Joss Whedon's Firefly*) as he had a recurring role on the show as a scientist named Knox. I haven't watched *Angel* yet (though I intend to watch the series on DVD) and was nonplused. I was kind of pissed when this thing was over because, in addition to Brendon punking out, I heard a pretty huge *Angel* spoiler from another panelist.

Finally, we attended a panel that the boy was really psyched about: the Cup o' [Joe Quesada], in which Marvel's Joe Quesada made tons of announcements about the upcoming year. We sat behind a guy with long, greasy hair, black painted fingernails and many ringed fingers, who turned around to join our conversation with the other semi-nerdy guy sitting to my right about the earlier Buffy panel. He was one of those guys who didn't look me in the eyes (get it?) and, at some point during Cup o' Joe, he answered his cell phone in a sniveling voice: "Mom! God, I'll call you later!" Did I mention he was about 35 years old? That was

definitely one of **the** most devastatingly nerdy things we saw all weekend (second only, perhaps, to **the** people who dressed as superheroes or obscure Star Wars characters).

Full Text

Headnote

A Non-Comic Reader's Journey through the New York Comic Con

The night we got together, I turned to my nowboyfriend and asked him a few questions about politics, "jokingly" assessing his opinions on various issues that I'm passionate about. Had he been, say, an anti-choice gay-basher it would have been a dealbreaker. Needless to say, he passed. In turn, he left Craig Thompson's graphic novel, *Blankets*, behind in my apartment. I read it in a day (and it's very long). He followed this with Garth Ennis's straight-up comic book series, *Preacher*. I read it in a few weeks. I learned the hard way that his test was much more complicated than mine. Nearly a year later, I have Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* books and Alan Moore's *Watchmen* sitting on my shelves, waiting to be read.

If you hadn't guessed, my boyfriend is a pretty hardcore comic book geek. No, he doesn't have oily hair and horrific acne and he definitely doesn't make me dress up as Wonder Woman (though I imagine he'd enjoy it). But he did get very excited when I found out I could get us press passes to the New York Comic Convention at the Javitz Center. Though I was initially trepidatious (having forayed only briefly into the extremely intimidating world of comics, with its wealth of scary stereotypes and labyrinthine alternative universes), I rarely turn down anything free - and could never turn down a chance to see Kevin Smith. So, I went with him. Plus, I really wanted to pass that damn test of his.

Our schedule for Friday, 2/23:

Panel: Marvel: Civil War Fallout: The Initiative

Q&A: Stan Lee: An American Icon

Panel: DC NATION!

I steeled myself on the first day for an entire convention center filled with people who emerge from their mother's basements and into the midwinter sun only once a year, in order to attend this holy weekend of nerd-dom. As soon as we arrived I realized how wrong my vision had been. I mean, yeah, there were the obligatory people who looked as though they'd never heard of life outside the DC and Marvel universes. But there were actually some good-looking guys, and in addition to the few hired hot chicks I'd expected to see hanging out trying to sell shit, there were a handful of good-looking girls too. I would be remiss, however, if I didn't mention the more ample handful of less attractive women, crammed into spandex outfits with flesh bulging in the wrong places, and men in spandex superhero garb with less bulging flesh, if you catch my meaning.

After checking into the press room, the boy and I flashed our impressive badges-which got us into everything-and made our way through the exhibition floor. We checked the Marvel and DC booths to make sure no one impressive was signing and then wandered a bit, stopping to geek out at the booth for Kevin Smith's comic store, Jay and Silent Bob's Secret Stash. Walt

Flanagan (one of Smith's friends, who's had cameos in nearly all his films) was just chilling out there, so I dug in my bag-full of the boy's comics, waiting to be signed if the opportunity presented itself-for his Clerks DVD and hid while he walked up and got it signed.

After a little while, we headed for our first panel. Boy gave me a bit of background about Civil War, a really ambitious book that basically upended the entire Marvel universe. The book, I came to learn after sitting through the panel, is a reflection of Marvel's unique approach to comics: their books take place in the "real" universe (with a timeline altered to allow characters to age very slowly) enabling Marvel artists and writers to make really interesting artistic and, occasionally, sociopolitical statements. In Civil War, a conservative government has enacted legislation forcing all superheroes to register and become part of a sort of army, an interesting commentary on the current political climate. I found this concept quite appealing. I was also charmed by Marvel's editor in chief, Joe Quesada, a slightly chubby guy in his late thirties with frosted hair, who proved to be insanely likeable. He wormed his way into my heart over the course of the weekend, when he revealed himself to be a Mets fan and got choked up while talking about his dad.

At the next panel, we got to see Stan Lee-incredibly vital at 84-host a Q&A. Lee, who I knew mostly from his small role in Kevin Smith's Mallrats, is responsible for the creation of Marvel comics. In addition, the famous Spider-Man, X-Men, Daredevil, the Hulk, the Avengers and the Fantastic Four all belong to him. Lee's multi-dimensional characters changed the face of the comic book industry, as did his intelligent writing. My boyfriend partly attributes his impressive vocabulary to growing up reading Stan Lee's comics. Lee also brought diversity to the comic world, introducing the first black superhero, the Black Panther. A black fan came up to the microphone at this event and thanked Lee, and Marvel in general, for its longstanding commitment to diversity and multi-culturalism.

After those two panels, I felt genuinely pumped to be there. The folks at Marvel were so passionate about the comic book form-even Jim McCann, the sales and marketing guy, chimed in with comments on his favorite books and characters-that I couldn't help but feel infected by their excitement. These guys weren't slick business types: the people at Marvel all seemed to be artists and geeks, people who were genuinely happy doing what they were doing. Their regret seemed authentic when fans expressed displeasure with the way their favorite books had turned out, and the panelists seemed incredibly interested in all the feedback people offered, even when the comments seemed ridiculous from where I was sitting.

Conversely, the "DC Nation" panel we attended as our final event on Friday evening was a highly orchestrated, corporate affair. Simply getting through the doors to the room where the panel was held was an ordeal: staffers were stationed handing out cryptic buttons with the message: "Jimmy Olsen Must Die."

In this panel, DC announced plans to follow up the successful weekly comic 52 with another weekly called Countdown. While 52 was apparently a self-contained story, DC editor in chief Dan DiDio (who, despite his rumpled clothes and baseball cap, was a lot slicker than Marvel's Quesada) promised that Countdown would "move the whole universe."

As the Q&A moved forward, DiDio asked audience members to turn over posters that were stationed on easels throughout the room to reveal cryptic tidbits about the new book. In this panel, very little actual information was loosed from the tight lips of the panelists and the marketing guy took a very active role in "shush-ing" the DC writers and editors.

At the rest of the DC events that weekend, similar buttons were to be handed out, we were told, and anyone who collected each one was given a special extra button at the end of the convention (check out DC 's marketing savvy).

"Marvel would never be that gimmicky," I said, as we streamed out with the crowd. My boyfriend looked amused. Horror, mixed with realization, spread across my face and boy laughed. Was I becoming one of them?

Saturday, 2/24:

Buffy the Vampire Slayer Panel: Slayer Tales with Xander, Kendra and Drusilla

Panel: DCU: A Better Tomorrow: Today!

Stan Lee Presents: Mosaic and Condor

Q&A: Kevin Smith Spotlight

Panel: Marvel: Cup o' Joe

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The DC panel was very similar to the previous days and featured many announcements I really didn't understand. A character with a funny name, Captain Carrot, would get a book this year; there would also be some battle between the Birds of Prey and the Secret Six that fans seemed very excited about. Afterward, in the same room, we saw Stan Lee again, this time promoting his company's straight-to-DVD movies. He also spoke about two upcoming animated features called Mosaic and Condor. True to his progressive roots, the cartoons feature, respectively, a Latin-American and a female superhero, the latter voiced by the talented Anna Paquin.

Later in the day we saw Kevin Smith (director of Clerks I and II, Chasing Amy and Dogma, among other things). If you haven't yet figured this out, Smith is one of my ultimate favorites.

It was exciting to see him in person and he's a very funny guy. Check out either of the Evening with Kevin Smith DVDs, though, and you'll basically have the same experience we had in person (except, of course, he will not see you raise your hand if you're a girl who would totally do him, fat be damned).

Finally, we attended a panel that the boy was really psyched about: the Cup o' Joe, in which Marvel's Joe Quesada made tons of announcements about the upcoming year. We sat behind a guy with long, greasy hair, black painted fingernails and many ringed fingers, who turned around to join our conversation with the other semi-nerdy guy sitting to my right about the earlier Buffy panel. He was one of those guys who didn't look me in the eyes (get it?) and, at some point during Cup o' Joe, he answered his cell phone in a sniveling voice: "Mom! God, I'll call you later!" Did I mention he was about 35 years old? That was definitely one of the most devastatingly nerdy things we saw all weekend (second only, perhaps, to the people who dressed as superheroes or obscure Star Wars characters).

Anyway, among the things I understood at the panel were announcements for a book based on sci-fi writer Orson Scott Card's Ender's Game series, a new character created by Lost writer Javier Grillo-Marxuach, and an upcoming series uncovering some of the Marvel universe's magic. Following the announcements was a lengthy Q&A, during which Joe Quesada was asked a question about a Daredevil miniseries he wrote and drew. He got choked up discussing the back story of this book, which he wrote after his dad passed away unexpectedly.

Sunday, 2/25:

Q&A: Brian K. Vaughan Spotlight

Today, I'd resolved to do two things: eat funnel cake (it had been tempting me all weekend and I'd eaten very healthily all week prior) and buy a geeky Kevin Smith-related t-shirt. Before the Brian K. Vaughan event we were attending, my boyfriend and I made our way around the exhibition floor. Boy found a copy of the first comic he ever read for only five dollars and purchased it, excited to revisit the birthplace of his obsession. Sadly, I did not find funnel cake, so I had to settle for a messy crepe smeared with Nutella.

We headed downstairs for the panel, with plans to return to the exhibition floor for my t-shirt. Vaughan is a comic book writer who, I learned, recently joined the staff of writers for Lost. He also writes two ongoing mature readers comics for Vertigo, which the boy explained is like the HBO of comic book companies (and a DC subsidiary, but an entirely different corporate animal). The two books, Y: The Last Man and Ex-Machina, have been optioned by New Line Cinemas, and Vaughan is writing the screenplays for both. He also created the Marvel characters The Runaways, teens who find out their parents are super-villains. The ongoing series is set to be taken over by Buffy creator and comic writer Joss Whedon. Vaughan, one of the industry's most successful writers, talked a bit about the process of writing. Books, he said, "are never finished - only abandoned."

I left this panel feeling somewhat inspired to go and pick up a comic book. Maybe I'll read Vaughan's Pride of Baghdad, a book based on the true story of the escape of a pride of lions from a Baghdad zoo after an American bombing. Vaughan explained, on Newsarama.com,

that the series is a "parable . . . [asking some] hard questions about the Iraq War, the nature of occupation, and the price of freedom."

Slightly worn out from the long weekend, we traveled once more upstairs and I did buy my t-shirt: it features Olaf, Jay's memorable Russian "Berserker" singing cousin from Clerks. A men's size small, it hangs down past my hips. On the upside, I'm probably much closer to passing my boyfriend's nerd test.

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Editor in Chief

Indexing (details)

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